

APOSTROPHE A figure of speech in which a speaker directly addresses an absent or dead person, an abstract quality, or something nonhuman as if it were present and capable of responding. Apostrophe was a popular device with the Romantic poets: Wordsworth apostrophizes the dead poet Milton in "London, 1802"; Shelley apostrophizes the west wind and a skylark; Keats apostrophizes a star, a nightingale, a Greek vase, and the season of autumn (all in Unit Five).

See page 700.

ASIDE Private words that a character in a play speaks to the audience or to another character, which are not supposed to be overheard by others onstage. Stage directions usually tell when a speech is an aside. For example, in Act I, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macbeth makes numerous asides to the audience as he ruminates about the possibility of becoming king.

See page 329.

ASSONANCE The repetition of similar vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds in words that are close together. Assonance differs from exact rhyme in that it does not repeat the consonant sound following the vowel. The words *face* and *base* rhyme, while the words *face* and *fade* are assonant. Like alliteration, assonance can create musical and rhythmic effects. In this line from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters," the repetition of long o sounds is **onomatopoeic**:

All day the wind breathes low with mellow tone

See page 1089.

ATMOSPHERE The mood or feeling in a literary work. Atmosphere is usually created through descriptive details and evocative language. For example, Ben Okri sets the mood of his short story "In the Shadow of War" (Unit Seven) with a dreamlike description of the wartime jungle around Lagos, Nigeria.

See pages 963, 1040.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY An account of a person's own life. One of the most famous autobiographies of the twentieth century is *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves. Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales" (Unit Seven) is another well-known autobiographical account.

BALLAD A song or songlike poem that tells a story. Most ballads have a regular pattern of **rhythm** and **rhyme**, and they use simple language with a great deal of repetition. Ballads generally have **refrains**—lines or words that are repeated at regular intervals. They usually tell sensational stories of tragedy, adventure, betrayal, revenge, and jealousy. **Folk ballads** are composed by anonymous singers and are passed down orally from generation to generation

before they are written down (often in several different versions). "Lord Randall" (Unit Two) is an example of a folk ballad. **Literary ballads**, on the other hand, are composed and written down by known poets, usually in the style of folk ballads. Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (Unit Five) is a famous literary ballad.

The typical **ballad stanza** is a quatrain with the rhyme scheme *abcb*. The first and third lines have four stressed syllables, and the second and fourth lines have three. The number of unstressed syllables in each line may vary, but often the meter is primarily **iambic**.

See pages 76, 83.

BIOGRAPHY An account of a person's life written or told by another person. *The Life of Samuel Johnson* by James Boswell (Unit Four) is one of the most famous biographies of all time.

See page 574.

BLANK VERSE Poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. "Blank" means the poetry is unrhymed. "Iambic pentameter" means that each line contains five iambs, or metrical **feet**, each consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (*u* */*). Blank verse is the most important metrical form used in English dramatic and epic poetry. It is the verse line used in Shakespeare's plays and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Unit Three). One of the reasons blank verse has been so popular, even among modern poets, is that it combines the naturalness of unrhymed verse with the structure of metrical verse. Except for free verse, it is the poetic form that sounds the most like natural speech. It also lends itself easily to slight variations within the basic pattern. Like most of the English Romantic poets, Wordsworth made extensive use of blank verse, as in these lines from *The Prelude*:

Oh! yet a few short years of useful life,
And all will be complete, thy race be run,
Thy monument of glory will be raised.

See pages 271, 330, 434.

CADENCE The natural rise and fall of the voice. Poets who write in **free verse** often try to imitate the cadences of spoken language.

See also *Rhythm*.

CAESURA A pause or break within a line of poetry, usually dictated by the natural rhythm of language. A mid-line, or **medial**, caesura is a characteristic element of Anglo-Saxon poetry; it divides the four-beat line in half. Later poets have used the caesura less predictably, as in the following lines from "Dulce et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen. (The caesuras are indicated by the symbol ||.)

EPITAPH An inscription on a tombstone, or a commemorative poem written as if for that purpose. Epitaphs range from the solemn to the comic. Here is a witty example by John Dryden:

Here lies my wife, here let her lie:
Now she's at rest, and so am I.

See pages 177, 377.

EPITHET An adjective or other descriptive phrase that is regularly used to characterize a person, place, or thing. Phrases such as "Peter the Great," "Richard the Lion-Hearted," and "America the Beautiful" are epithets. Homer created so many descriptive epithets in his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that his name has been permanently associated with a type of epithet. The **Homeric epithet** consists of a compound adjective that is regularly used to modify a particular noun. Famous examples are "the wine-dark sea," "the gray-eyed goddess Athena," and the "rosy-fingered dawn."

See also *Kenning*.

ESSAY A short piece of nonfiction prose that examines a single subject from a limited point of view. There are two major types of essays. **Informal essays** (also called **personal essays**) generally reveal a great deal about the personalities and feelings of their authors. They tend to be conversational, sometimes even humorous in tone, and they are usually highly subjective. **Formal essays** (also called **traditional essays**) are usually serious and impersonal in tone. Because they are written to inform or persuade, they are expected to be factual, logical, and tightly organized.

In English literature, the essay began with Sir Francis Bacon, who published his extremely formal *Essays* (Unit Three) in 1597. The English informal essay was pioneered by Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele (Unit Four) in the early eighteenth century. Another outstanding informal essayist is Charles Lamb (Unit Five).

See page 740.

FABLE A very brief story in prose or verse that teaches a moral, or a practical lesson about life. The characters in most fables are animals that behave and speak like human beings. Some of the most popular fables are those attributed to Aesop, who was supposed to have been a slave in ancient Greece.

See pages 110, 467.
See also *Parable*.

FALLING ACTION See *Climax*.

FARCE A type of comedy in which ridiculous and often stereotyped characters are involved in farfetched, silly situations.

The humor in farce is based on crude physical action, slapstick, and clowning. Characters may slip on banana peels, get pies thrown in their faces, and knock one another on the head with ladders. Abbott and Costello, Laurel and Hardy, and Marx Brothers movies are examples of farces.

The word *farce* comes from a Latin word for "stuffing," and in fact farces were originally used to fill in the waiting time between the acts of a serious play. Even in tragedies, farcical elements are often included to provide comic relief. Shakespeare, for example, frequently lets his "common" characters engage in farcical actions.

See pages 869, 906.

FIGURE OF SPEECH A word or phrase that describes one thing in terms of another and is not meant to be understood on a literal level. Figures of speech always involve some sort of imaginative comparison between seemingly unlike things.

Some 250 different types of figures of speech have been identified, but the most common are the **simile** ("My beloved is like a roe or a young hart"), the **metaphor** ("The Lord is my shepherd"), and **personification** ("Death, be not proud").

See also *Metaphor*, *Personification*, *Simile*, *Symbol*.

FLASHBACK A scene in a movie, play, short story, novel, or narrative poem that interrupts the present action of the plot to "flash backward" and tell what happened at an earlier time. "The Demon Lover" by Elizabeth Bowen (Unit Seven) includes a flashback that describes Mrs. Drover's farewell to her fiancé twenty-five years before the main action of the story takes place.

See page 999.

FOIL A character who is used as a contrast to another character. This contrast emphasizes the differences between two characters, bringing out the distinctive qualities in each. In Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Unit Seven), Colonel Pickering is a foil to Henry Higgins. The colonel is thoughtful, considerate, and courteous at all times, while Higgins is consistently inconsiderate and self-centered.

FORESHADOWING The use of clues to hint at what is going to happen later in the plot. Foreshadowing arouses the reader's curiosity and builds up **suspense**. Foreshadowing occurs in Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover" (Unit Seven) when Mrs. Drover imagines "spectral glitters in the place of" her fiancé's eyes, and when we learn that she made an "unnatural promise" to him—that she "could not have plighted a more sinister troth."

See page 1158.
See also *Suspense*.

SIMILE A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things by using a connective word such as *like*, *as*, *than*, or *resembles*. Here is a simile from "It Is a Beauteous Evening" by William Wordsworth, which makes a connection between two sound images:

The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration. . .

See pages 211, 366, 434.

See also *Figure of Speech*, *Metaphor*.

SOLILOQUY A long speech in which a character who is usually alone onstage expresses his or her private thoughts or feelings. The soliloquy is an old dramatic convention that was particularly popular in Shakespeare's day. Perhaps the most famous soliloquy is the "To be or not to be" speech in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Another major soliloquy occurs toward the end of *Macbeth*, when Macbeth bewails his wife's death in his "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech (Act V, Scene 5, lines 19–28).

See pages 226, 231, 329.

SONNET A fourteen-line lyric poem, usually written in iambic pentameter, that has one of several rhyme schemes. There are two major types of sonnets. The oldest sonnet form is the **Italian sonnet**, also called the **Petrarchan sonnet** (after the fourteenth-century Italian poet Francesco Petrarch, who popularized the form). The Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two parts: an eight-line **octave** with the rhyme scheme *abbaabba* and a six-line **sestet** with the rhyme scheme *cdecde* or *cdcdcd*. The octave usually presents a problem, poses a question, or expresses an idea, which the sestet then resolves, answers, or drives home. John Donne's sonnets (Unit Three) and John Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (Unit Five) are written in the Italian form.

The other major sonnet form, which was widely used by Shakespeare, is called the **Shakespearean sonnet**, or the **English sonnet**. It has three four-line units, or **quatrains**, followed by a concluding two-line unit, or **couplet**. The organization of thought in the Shakespearean sonnet usually corresponds to this structure. The three quatrains often express related ideas or examples, while the couplet sums up the poet's conclusion or message. The most common rhyme scheme for the Shakespearean sonnet is *abab cdcd efef gg*.

A third type of sonnet, the **Spenserian sonnet**, was developed by Edmund Spenser (Unit Three). Like the Shakespearean sonnet, it is divided into three quatrains and a couplet, but it uses a rhyme scheme that links the quatrains: *abab bcbc cdcd ee*.

A group of sonnets on a related theme is called a **sonnet sequence** or a **sonnet cycle**.

See pages 191, 338.

SPENSERIAN STANZA A nine-line stanza with the rhyme scheme *ababbcbcc*. The first eight lines of the stanza are in iambic pentameter, and the ninth line is an **alexandrine**—that is, a line of iambic hexameter. The form was created by Edmund Spenser for his long poem *The Faerie Queene* (Unit Three). Several English Romantic poets have used the Spenserian stanza, including John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and Robert Burns.

See pages 200, 693.

STANZA A group of consecutive lines in a poem that form a single unit. A stanza in a poem is something like a paragraph in prose: It often expresses a unit of thought. A stanza may consist of only one line, or of any number of lines beyond that. The word *stanza* is an Italian word for "stopping place" or "place to rest."

See pages 200, 693.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS A writing style that tries to depict the random flow of thoughts, emotions, memories, and associations rushing through a character's mind. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf both wrote stream-of-consciousness novels.

See pages 976, 979.

SUSPENSE The uncertainty or anxiety we feel about what is going to happen next in a story. Writers often create suspense by dropping hints or clues that something—especially something bad—is going to happen. In "The Demon Lover" by Elizabeth Bowen (Unit Seven), we begin to feel suspense when Mrs. Drover receives a mysterious letter that makes her lips "go white"; our anxiety increases sharply when the flashback reveals that the letter-writer is her old fiancé; and our suspense reaches a climax when she escapes into a taxi and we discover who the driver is.

See pages 284, 316.

SYMBOL A person, place, thing, or event that stands both for itself and for something beyond itself. Many symbols have become widely recognized: A lion is a symbol of power; a dove is a symbol of peace. These established symbols are sometimes called **public symbols**. But writers often invent new, personal symbols, whose meaning is revealed in a work of poetry or prose. For example, the old house in Graham Greene's "The Destructors" (Unit Seven) is a symbol of civilization and beauty.

See pages 146, 155, 641, 718, 991.

SYMBOLISM A literary movement that began in France during the late nineteenth century and advocated the use of highly personal symbols to suggest ideas, emotions, and moods. The French Symbolists believed that emotions are fleeting, individual, and essentially inexpressible—and that therefore the poet is forced to suggest meaning

rather than directly express it. Many twentieth-century writers were influenced by the Symbolists, including William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Dylan Thomas.

TERZA RIMA An interlocking, three-line stanza form with the rhyme scheme *aba bcb cdc ded* and so on. Terza rima is an Italian verse form (Dante used it in *The Divine Comedy*) that many English poets have used. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (Unit Five) is one of the most famous examples of English terza rima.

See page 699.

THEME The central idea or insight of a work of literature. A theme is not the same as the subject of a work, which can usually be expressed in a word or two: old age, ambition, love. The theme is the idea the writer wishes to convey *about* that subject—the writer's view of the world or revelation about human nature. For example, one theme of James Joyce's "Araby" (Unit Seven) might be stated this way: One of the painful aspects of growing up is that some of our dreams turn out to be illusions.

A theme may also be different from a *moral*, which is a lesson or rule about how to live. The theme of "Araby" stated above, for example, would not make sense as a moral.

While some stories, poems, and plays have themes that are directly stated, most themes are implied. It is up to the reader to piece together all the clues the writer has provided about the work's total meaning. Two of the most important clues to consider are how the main character has changed and how the conflict has been resolved.

See pages 38, 231, 637, 948, 1020.

TONE The attitude a writer takes toward the reader, a subject, or a character. Tone is conveyed through the writer's choice of words and details. For example, Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" (Unit Four) is satiric in tone, while the tone of "Pied Beauty" by Gerard Manley Hopkins (Unit Six) might be described as awed.

See pages 46, 344, 549, 981.

TRAGEDY A play, novel, or other narrative depicting serious and important events, in which the main character comes to an unhappy end. In a tragedy, the main character is usually dignified, courageous, and often high ranking. This character's downfall may be caused by a **tragic flaw**—an error in judgment or character weakness—or the downfall may result from forces beyond his or her control. The tragic hero or heroine usually wins some self-knowledge and wisdom, even though he or she suffers defeat,

possibly even death. Tragedy is distinct from **comedy**, in which an ordinary character overcomes obstacles to get what he or she wants. *Beowulf*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are all tragedies.

See pages 330, 332, 545.

See also *Comedy*.

UNDERSTATEMENT A figure of speech that consists of saying less than what is really meant, or saying something with less force than is appropriate. Understatement is the opposite of **hyperbole** and is a form of **irony**. You are using understatement if you come in from a torrential downpour and say, "It's a bit wet out there," or if you describe a Great Dane as "not exactly a small dog." Understatement can be used to create a kind of deadpan humor, but it can also function as a sustained ironic tone throughout a work, as in W. H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" (Unit Seven).

See pages 437, 549.

VILLANELLE A nineteen-line poem divided into five tercets (three-line stanzas), each with the rhyme scheme *aba*, and a final quatrain with the rhyme scheme *abaa*. Line 1 is repeated entirely to form lines 6, 12, and 18, while line 3 is repeated as lines 9, 15, and 19. Thus there are only two rhymes in the poem, and the two lines used as refrains (lines 1 and 3) are paired as the final couplet. The villanelle was originally used in French pastoral poetry. Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (Unit Seven) is an example of a modern villanelle.

See page 1131.

WIT A quality of speech or writing that combines verbal cleverness with keen perception, especially of the incongruous. The definition of *wit* has undergone dramatic changes over the centuries. In the Middle Ages it meant "common sense," in the Renaissance it meant "intelligence," and in the seventeenth century it meant "originality of thought." The modern meaning of *wit* began to develop during the eighteenth century with the formulations of John Dryden and Alexander Pope. In his *Essay on Criticism* (Unit Four), Pope said:

True wit is Nature to advantage dressed:
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed

Perhaps the best examples of more modern wit can be found in the works of Oscar Wilde (Unit Six) and Bernard Shaw (Unit Seven).

See pages 542, 684.